

**ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY ADVISORY COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES**

March 19, 2021 9:00 am – 11:15 am  
Meeting held virtually via Microsoft Teams

Council Members Present: Peter Bourque, Chair, Farmingdale; Dave Basley, Ashland; Brent Hardy, Dedham; James MacCartney, National Park Service rep.; Josie Allen, Haymock Lake; Tobey Pineo, Hampden

Bureau of Parks and Lands Staff: Andy Cutko, Ron Hunt, Jim Vogel, Matt LaRoche,

Other BPL Staff and Members of the Public Present: Mark Deroche (BPL Northern Region Parks); Kevin Brown, Trevor O’Leary (AWW Rangers); Bob McIntosh, Paul Johnson (AWW Foundation); Shawn Mahaney, Jay Clement (US Army Corps of Engineers, ME Project Office); Melanie Sturm (NRCM); Greg Shute (Chewonki Foundation).

### **Introductions and Opening Remarks**

Director Andy Cutko opened the meeting at 9:01 am, made a few requests regarding use of the Teams application during the meeting, and asked the Council members to introduce themselves, followed by BPL staff and members of the public. Jim Vogel of the Bureau served as note-taker for this meeting.

### **Approval of December 11, 2020 minutes**

Chair Peter Bourque asked if there were any comments or corrections on the minutes. Brent Hardy requested a correction on page 5 of the notes, under Follow Up Comments – he had commented on the need to pursue funding for the restoration of the boarding house, not the barn roof. James MacCartney moved that the 12/11/20 minutes be accepted with the changes discussed. This was seconded, and the minutes were approved by voice vote.

### **Director’s Report – Andy Cutko**

#### Retirement of AWW Superintendent

Andy noted Matt LaRoche’s retirement at the end of the month, shared some personal recollections of a visit to the AWW in summer 2019 with the DACF Commissioner, and offered that the Bureau will plan a proper send-off for Matt, when COVID conditions allow. He then provided an update on the process for hiring Matt’s replacement, noting that the quality of the applicants has been high and several candidates were recently interviewed.

#### Status of AWW Council Appointments

Andy reported that Peter Bourque’s appointment has been approved, while a replacement for Melford Pelletier, representing historic and cultural resources, is not yet approved. He is checking in with the Governor’s office regularly on that appointment.

#### St. John Uplands Plan

Jim Vogel reported that the management plan for Public Lands in the Allagash region (The St. John Uplands Region Plan) has been completed and will be delivered the DACF Commissioner soon for adoption.

### **2020 AWW Annual Report – Matt**

Matt presented the report on a shared screen, and reviewed a number of highlights from several sections, including:

- Financials: FY 2021 budget, 2020 Revenues from camping fees, 2020 expenses
- Recreational use in 2020
- Historical Interpretation, Outreach, Education
- Staff and Training
- Forest Harvest Notifications
- Project Accomplishments

- Dam Report: repair and maintenance needs, results of MEMA inspections and recommendation
- Volunteer projects
- Incidents
- Superintendent's Report

#### Follow-up Questions/Comments

- Peter Bourque asked Matt whether Round Up herbicide is used by forest landowners in the AWW region. Matt reported that it is, in combination with other herbicides, but no aerial spraying is occurring.
- Bob Macintosh commented in appreciation for Matt in his tenure as AWW Superintendent, and his appreciation for Matt's article published in the Bangor Daily News that highlighted the partnership with the AWW Foundation.
- Greg Chute also offered his compliments and thanks for Matt for his service.
- Jay Clement (USACE) asked a question regarding the Bureau's obligation to do plantings at Churchill Dam, as part of the Corp permit conditions, and how that intersects with vegetation clearing recommended by MEMA; Matt responded that the type of herbaceous planting done did not create a conflict, in that the recommended clearing pertains to woody vegetation. Jay requested plans for any vegetation clearing that might be done.
- Jay also asked about funding for repair or replacement of Telos Dam; Andy acknowledged it is a key need, and stated there is some reason for optimism in meeting the need via a bond issuance, LWCF funding, or other sources being explored. Andy also noted that AWW Superintendent candidates are being asked about fund raising in their interviews, with the recognition that it will be a needed skill.

### **2021 Winter Activity Report – Matt**

#### Water Levels

- Telos Dam is currently at 5.2 feet above the sill
  - 0.5 foot above the October togue spawning level
  - Releasing 102 cfs
- Churchill Dam elevation is 926.8 feet above sea level
  - 0.4 foot above the October togue spawning level
  - Releasing 184 cfs
- Lock Dam
  - Releasing 22 cfs (1 gate open 1.0 feet)

#### Snow Levels/Water Content (3/16/21)

- Chamberlain Bridge
  - Average snow depth = 19.9 inches
  - Water content = 5.17 inches

#### Public Use

- 31 of the 40 available sites at Chamberlain Bridge are sold for the winter season
- 1 less than last year

#### Fishing

- The fishing was very good during the first few weeks of the ice fishing season, with a few 20+ inch brook trout being taken.
- The fishing has been slower than normal in February and March. Except Allagash Lake, which has been good all winter with many smaller lake trout being taken.
- The fishing has recently picked up for whitefish and togue on Chamberlain Lake.

#### Projects since December meeting

- All 19 snowmobile access trails cleared of blowdowns
- Crew hauled several tow sleds of superhumus to 4 different campsites
- Supplies (firewood/propane and gasoline) have been hauled to out remote camps
  - Allagash Lake, Eagle Lake, Camp Pleasant, Round Pond

- 8 picnic tables have been built and hauled to campsites
- Trevor is doing an overhaul of our 2002 Polaris Ranger this winter
- Some old metal barrels and other debris have been hauled from the campsite on the Umbazooksus end of the Mud Pond Carry trail.

#### Training

- All waterway staff have taken Cyber Security training
- Kevin and Trevor took an FAA course to be licensed drone pilots
- Trevor took an online Power Point course
- AWW rangers and local Game Wardens had a joint winter rescue training utilizing our rescue sleds

#### Miscellaneous

- The waterway had 47 applicants for the 2021 Visiting Artist Program
- We secured an RTP grant last year for funding a 4-week MCC crew. MCC crew was canceled last summer due to COVID concerns. I was assured they will send a crew to the AWW in 2021.
  - The crew will assist in the construction of a new campsite on the north end of the waterway. It will be called Twin Brooks South. (Permits are in-hand for this project)
  - They will also assist with shoreline stabilization at McKeen Brook Campsite and installation of wooden steps at Big Brook South Campsite. (Permits in-hand)
- BPL has received a MOHF grant for the purchase of AEDs for several State Parks and all 6 AWW ranger stations
  - These AEDs have been purchased
  - Training and distribution of the AEDs take place this spring
- The AWW annual report has been completed and delivered to the ACF committee (many thanks to Kevin Brown and Abigail Andreasen for helping with this report)
- AWW Foundation is funding a natural resource assessment in the AWW

#### Situations

- 1 snowmobile accident
- 1 snowmobile through the ice

#### Special Activity Permits

- Adventure Scientists – taking water quality samples and analyzing for pollutants
- The Timber Cross Film and Media – use of a drone at the tramway

#### **Final Report on UM AWW Visitor's Survey - Matt**

- Final report is not yet done. Comments are being incorporated and expect the final report to be ready in April

#### **Tramway Use and Interpretation – Matt**

Matt outlined the history of increased foot access to the historic locomotives and the tramway over several decades, from a “bushwack” to user-created trails and culminating in the authorization of an official access trail and improvement of a road bringing walk-in visitors closer to the public lands in 2019. Matt reported visitor use numbers for the site based on North Maine Woods data (which likely greatly under-report actual use), indicating a several-fold increase in use over the past 3 years and a doubling in the 2020 season (possibly due in part to the effects of the COVID-19 situation) from almost 1,900 people to over 3,700 people. Ranger Kevin Brown installed a trail counter this winter, and gave the following details:

- Equipment includes a TRAFx infrared counter and a portable dock to download data in the field
- Counter is placed ~10 feet from where people will cross
- Can analyze the data on a website provided by TRAFx and produce charts, including daily and hourly visitation
- Counter is providing better data than the anecdotal and occasional observations of the past
- Counter was set up Feb. 8 and taken down March 17 (on a snowmobile trail)
- Will install on the foot trail in spring (May)

Matt reported that the BPL Interpretive Specialist is working on a panel for the trailhead, to be installed by spring. The panel will tell the history of the tramway, with pictures, and will also provide AWW information.

#### Follow-up Questions/Comments

- Brent commented that it is likely that COVID skewed visitor numbers
- Brent commented that he believes the interpretative information should be installed on a kiosk at the tramway (not the trailhead) and that many folks don't know what the tramway is. He asked why this should not be allowed if signs are allowed at the historic boarding house site at Churchill Dam.
- Matt responded that Churchill Dam is a different situation because it is a developed site with the dam and other man-made features. He also stated that the aim is to apply the least amount of management necessary, and that the trailhead panel should be tried as a first step under that principle. He reported that they have gotten complaints from guides and others about the number of people they now encounter at the trains. What they are attempting to do is to balance it all out.
- Dave Basley asked - why couldn't a panel similar to what was installed at the tramway (near the machinery at the end opposite from the locomotives) be installed near the trains?
- Matt responded that that signage was installed on a log to avoid introducing a new structure, and that a lot of thought went into how to install signage with the least impact on the wilderness setting.
- Josey commented the "simpler the better" regarding the interpretive signage, just give people information to get in and out to the trains and the basics of the history.

#### **Update on Churchill Dam and Churchill Barn Repairs – Matt**

Matt reported that \$20K has been allocated from RTP for ADA improvements at the Michaud Farm and Chamberlain Bridge ranger stations. \$15K has been allocated by RTP for a new campsite near West Twin Brook and for campsite improvements. \$45K has been allocated for repair of Churchill Dam. The fishway baffles at the dam also need repair, and Matt is pursuing how to accomplish that. Regarding barn repairs, the estimate to jack and level the structure and replace the cedar roof is \$75K. An engineer is working on plans for work on the boarding house.

#### **Churchill Boarding House Funding Discussion – All**

- Brent commented that past work by volunteers has kept the structure from being totally lost, and that there is a mandate to maintain the structure but that has never been done.
- Jim MacCartney (NPS) was asked to provide an update on possible NPS funding and reported that he has made inquiries, but more clarification is needed. NPS may have some other funding sources.
- Peter Bourque asked for clarification about what funds are not allowed to be used for the repairs; Matt responded that LWCF funds are not allowed to be used on historic structures. Ron Hunt clarified that placement of the site on the National Historic Register is what disallows use of LWCF funds.
- Brent asked if Andy had more to add on potential funding. Andy mentioned the possibility of a Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund (MOHF) grant, which would require a match.
- Matt stated that 2015 estimates were \$86K for stabilization and \$200K for restoration. Brent commented that those are probably low estimates now.
- Matt mentioned the owner of Clayton Lake Woodlands as a potential source of private funding; it was agreed this would be good contact to make. Andy offered to reach out to LandVest, a major timberland owner with which the state has a relationship, to gauge interest. He will also seek guidance from the State Historic Preservation Office on possible project funding.
- Dave Basley mentioned to possibility of pursuing funding from the Maine Community Foundation; Josie and Brent seconded the idea.
- Ron Hunt mentioned that the AWW has a donation account; donations can be earmarked for a specific purpose, and there are no overhead charges. Josie asked if it was possible to set up a boarding house fund for donations, and suggested that the Bureau could advertise at the site for donations.

### **IF&W Update on Ice Caves at Allagash Lake – Chair Peter Bourque**

Peter reported on his consultation with IF&W biologists, and outlined the history of the caves' discovery and specifically the discovery of the presence of bats, which is the primary issue of concern:

- The caves were first discovered in 1897 but were explored and mapped in detail, and maps published, in 1996-99.
- The caves are one of only three bat hibernacula in Maine.
- Little brown bats comprise ~80% of the population, and Northern long-eared bats ~20%, with a few other species also present.
- In 2015, all bat species were protected under the Maine Endangered Species Act, and Northern long-eared bat was protected under the federal ESA.
- White nose syndrome has resulted in a 90% reduction in the bat populations in the hibernacula.
- The State worked with 7 Islands to block a road following a harvest to protect the caves.

### **Comments/Questions**

- Brent asked if bats summer in the cave; Peter responded, no, the bats are present from early October through the end of April.

### **Other Old Business/New Business**

- Brent asked what the transition plan was for Matt's position. Ron Hunt responded will become vacant on April 1, and due to financial concerns, it will remain vacant until June 6. The position may be filled temporarily until June 6 if an inhouse candidate is hired.

### **Public Comment**

- Paul Johnson (AWW Foundation) offered comments acknowledging Matt's exemplary service as AWW Superintendent.
- Bob McIntosh (AWW Foundation) commented that the Storied Lands and Waters report has recommendations on installation of interpretive materials, stating that panels should be installed at locations other than at the historic sites themselves. He also stated that the Foundation is ready to help with boarding house rehab funding, and that it would help in pursuing funds if AWW can identify a use for the structure (especially the first floor).
- AWW Ranger Trever O'Leary offered his comments in appreciation of Matt's leadership.

### **Closing Comments**

- Andy thanked all for their participation and commented that the meetings may return to an in-person format in the future but -- recognizing that the meetings via videoconference have gone well, and don't require hours of travel -- some mix of in-person and videoconference meetings may be best.
- All were reminded that a date of June 18 was set for the next meeting.

### **Adjournment**

It was moved and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. The motion passed unanimously.  
Meeting adjourned at appx. 11:12 am.